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**17/SMS10/004**

**Assignment Title:** Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War  
**Course Title:** The Cold War  
**Course Code:** PCS 302

**Question**

You are required to read up on the end of the Cold War:

* Highlight the role of Mikhail Gorbachev and his policies in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.
* Discuss the role of President *Ronald Reagan* of the USA in ending the Cold War.
* Discuss the implication of the collapse of the Cold War on global politics with an emphasis on the emergence of a "New World Order."

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ANSWERS

The Soviet Union Collapses

This atmosphere of possibility soon enveloped the Soviet Union itself. Frustration with the bad economy combined with Gorbachev’s hands-off approach to Soviet satellites, inspiring independence movements in the republics on the U.S.S.R.’s fringes. One by one, the Baltic states (Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia) declared their independence from Moscow.

On August 18, 1991, concerned members of the Communist party in the military and government placed Gorbachev under house arrest. The official reason given for his imprisonment was his “inability for health reasons” to lead as president, though the public knew better. Leaders of the coup declared a state of emergency.

The military moved on Moscow, but their tanks were met with human chains and citizens building barricades to protect Russian Parliament. Boris Yelsin, then the chair of parliament, stood on top of one of those tanks to rally the surrounding crowds. The coup failed after three days. On December 8, a newly-free Gorbachev traveled to Minsk, where he met with leaders of the Republic of Belarus and Ukraine, signing an agreement that broke the two countries away from the U.S.S.R to create the Commonwealth of Independent States. The agreement read, in part, “The Soviet Union as a subject of international and geopolitical reality no longer exists.” Just weeks later, Belarus and Ukraine were followed by eight of the nine remaining republics, who declared their independence from the U.S.S.R. after a meeting in Alma-Ata, in today’s Kazakhstan. (Georgia joined two years later.)

Back in the Moscow, Gorbachev’s star was falling while another politician was rising: Boris Yelstin, the man who had stood atop that tank before parliament, now had control of both parliament and the KGB. Gorbachev’s resignation as president was inevitable, and on Christmas Day, 1991, he gave up his office, saying, “We’re now living in a new world. An end has been put to the Cold War and to the arms race, as well as to the mad militarization of the country, which has crippled our economy, public attitudes and morals.” The mighty Soviet Union had fallen.

**Discuss the role of President *Ronald Reagan* of the USA in ending the Cold War**.

The foreign policy of the Ronald Reagan administration from 1981 to 1989 was characterized by a strategy of “peace through strength.” Critics label Reagan’s policies as aggressive, imperialistic, and “warmongering”; however, these policies were supported by leading American conservatives who argued they were necessary to protect U.S. security interests. While Ronald Reagan worked to restrict the influence of the federal government in people’s lives, he simultaneously pursued interventionist policies abroad as part of a global Cold War strategy. Eager to cure the United States of “Vietnam Syndrome,” he increased the American stockpile of weapons and aided anti-Communist groups in the Caribbean and Central America. As part of the policies that became known as the Reagan Doctrine, the United States also offered financial and logistical support to the anti-communist opposition in central Europe, and took an increasingly hard line against socialist and communist governments in Afghanistan, Angola, and Nicaragua.

Reagan escalated the Cold War during his presidency, accelerating a reversal from the policy of détente that began in 1979, following the Soviet war in Afghanistan. Reagan ordered a massive buildup of the United States Armed Forces and implemented new policies toward the Soviet Union. He revived the B-1 Lancer program that had been canceled by the Carter administration, and began producing the MX missile. In response to Soviet deployment of the SS-20, Reagan oversaw the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO’s) deployment of the Pershing missile in West Germany.

Together with the United Kingdom’s prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, Reagan denounced the Soviet Union in ideological terms. In a famous address given on June 8, 1982 to the British Parliament in the Royal Gallery of the Palace of Westminster, Reagan said, “the forward march of freedom and democracy will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history.” On March 3, 1983, he predicted that communism would collapse, stating, “Communism is another sad, bizarre chapter in human history, whose last pages even now are being written.” In a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals on March 8, 1983, Reagan called the Soviet Union “an evil empire.”

On September 1, 1983, Soviet fighters struck down Korean Air Lines Flight 007, carrying 269 people, including Georgia congressman Larry McDonald, near Moneron Island. Reagan labeled the act a “massacre,” and responded to the incident by suspending all Soviet passenger air service to the United States; he also dropped several agreements under negotiation with the Soviets, wounding them financially. As a result of the shoot-down—the cause of KAL 007’s going astray was thought to be inadequacies related to its navigational system—Reagan announced on September 16, 1983 that the Global Positioning System would be made available for civilian use, free of charge, to avert similar navigational errors in future.

During 1987 summit meetings, Reagan and Gorbachev agreed to nuclear arms reductions, ushering in the end of the decades-long Cold War. By the later years of the Cold War, Moscow had built a military that consumed as much as 25% of the Soviet Union’s gross national product, at the expense of consumer goods and investment in civilian sectors. However, the size of the Soviet armed forces was not necessarily the result of a simple action-reaction arms race with the United States. Instead, Soviet spending on the arms race and other Cold War commitments can be understood as both a cause and effect of the deep-seated structural problems in the Soviet system, which accumulated at least a decade of economic stagnation during the Brezhnev years. Soviet investment in the defense sector was not necessarily driven by military necessity but in large part by the interests of massive party and state bureaucracies dependent on the sector for their own power and privileges.

**Discuss the implication of the collapse of the Cold War on global politics with an emphasis on the emergence of a "New World Order."**

The term "**new world order**" has been used to refer to any new period of history evidencing a dramatic change in world political thought and the balance of power. Despite various interpretations of this term, it is primarily associated with the ideological notion of world governance only in the sense of new collective efforts to identify, understand, or address worldwide problems that go beyond the capacity of individual nation-states to solve.

The phrase "new world order" or similar language was used in the period toward the end of the First World War in relation to Woodrow Wilson's vision for international peace; Wilson called for a League of Nations to prevent aggression and conflict. The phrase was used sparingly at the end of World War II when describing the plans for the United Nations and the Bretton Woods system partly because of its negative associations with the failed League of Nations. However, many commentators have applied the term retroactively to the order put in place by the World War II victors as a "new world order."

The most widely discussed application of the phrase of recent times came at the end of the Cold War. Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush used the term to try to define the nature of the post-Cold War era and the spirit of great power cooperation that they hoped might materialize. Gorbachev's initial formulation was wide-ranging and idealistic, but his ability to press for it was severely limited by the internal crisis of the Soviet system. In comparison, Bush's vision was not less circumscribed: "A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known". However, given the new unipolar status of the United States, Bush's vision was realistic in saying that "there is no substitute for American leadership". The Gulf War of 1991 was regarded as the first test of the new world order: "Now, we can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the very real prospect of a new world order. [...] The Gulf war put this new world to its first test".

The Cold War shaped American foreign policy and political ideology, impacted the domestic economy and the presidency, and affected the personal lives of Americans creating a climate of expected conformity and normalcy. By the end of the 1950's, dissent slowly increased reaching a climax by the late 1960's. The Cold War was to last almost to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the death of the Soviet Union. The origins of the Cold War can be traced to the late 1910's when America experienced the Red Scare. Suspicion and apprehension of the Soviet Union remained constant throughout the twenties and thirties intensifying with Josef Stalin's brutal regime.

When Russia was invaded by the Nazis, those concerns were temporarily set aside as the Soviet Union became an ally. As World War II came to a close with imminent allied victory, differences surfaced between the Americans and the Soviets. Some historians believed that five major issues separated the two future adversaries: the impending government of Eastern European countries, Poland, economic reconstruction, Germany's future, and the atomic bomb. Some issues focused on the notion of "sphere of influence". The Soviet's sphere originally centered around their borders, while the United States' centered around Western Europe.

Even though Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) was prepared to live with this notion, widespread political opposition existed in Washington as exemplified by Congressman John Dingell's statement in August 1943, "We Americans are not sacrificing, fighting, and dying to make permanent and more powerful the communistic government of Russia and to make Joseph Stalin a dictator over the liberated countries of Europe." (1) On the issue of what type of government should rule Eastern Europe, obviously a democratically elected administration was the American expectation. The same was said for Poland and Germany. However, FDR recognized Poland as an integral part of the Soviet's sphere of influence, but he hoped Stalin would give concessions to appear as if the Atlantic Charter was being implemented. In Germany's case, the Soviets and Americans acknowledged the permanent destruction of the German industrial capability as a way to prevent a third conflict, but the plan failed.

The Soviets argued that a pastoral Germany would be unable to make war reparations. American business interests and policy makers strangely agreed, but for different reasons. A strong German industry they argued would be a key to postwar commerce and trade releasing the United States from supporting the German economy for an extended period. The issue of European economic reconstruction was entirely in the hands of the Americans, who possessed the strongest economy during and after the conflict. From the Soviet Union, Stalin was eagerly persuaded by American interests to petition for a loan ranging from $1 billion in 1943 to $10 billion in 1945. As the war ended, enthusiasm turned to skepticism when American diplomats perceived a toughening of Soviet policy. Fearing a return to recession and misuse of funds, Congress placed drastic limits on lend-lease support pointing out that requests for loans after the war would meet deep uncertainty. Ultimately, the Soviets never received any monetary assistance. The final agenda separating the former allies was the atomic bomb. From the moment it became a reality, FDR agreed to share its secrets with the British and no one else except by mutual consent. Agreements were signed, including the reassurance that Great Britain would remain a world power after the war, and also providing for maximum secrecy in regards to atomic weapons. However, it did so in a manner that aroused Soviet suspicions about the intentions of its two allies. As these suspicions mounted and the gulf widened between the two superpowers, the presidency felt the tentacles of the emerging conflict.

The Cold War brought about changes to the presidency of the United States. Internal and external forces influenced those changes. Internally, Truman's hardline stand against Stalin put enough pressure on his administration to affect many presidential acts. Externally, politicians used anti-communist hysteria to campaign on a strong, rightist platform, occasionally accusing the current administration of softness in order to improve their lot. In one instance Robert Taft blamed Truman for seeking a congress "dominated by a policy of appeasing the Russians abroad and of fostering communism at home." (2) American foreign policy became one of containment as it reacted to the Cold War. As the mutual confidence of the two nations weakened, a kind of chess game evolved using the world map as its board. The United States supported corrupt and anti-democratic governments, but friendly to America. Meanwhile, the Soviets subsidized groups favorable to their own interest.

The Cold War's rhetoric and anti-communist propaganda dictated foreign policy. In scaring "the hell out of the American people", Truman unleashed a fervor that would become part of American life and modify existing relationships to the outside world. American allies depended almost exclusively on their stance on communism. The same applied for domestic policy. The Cold War affected domestic policy two ways: socially and economically. Socially, the intensive indoctrination of the American people led to a regression of social reforms. Economically, enormous growth spurred by industries related to war was aided by heavy government expansion. However, New Deal economics felt the greatest impact of the Cold War. By the 1950's, New Deal reforms were often associated with the left. Its advocates were attacked for promoting programs close to the realm of socialism. The presidencies of Truman and Eisenhower kept away from the Rooseveltian ideals of social and economic reforms. For veterans the economic future brightened as the government spent countless resources through the GI Bill, VA and FHA loans to help them buy new homes or receive an education. Social reforms in the fields of civil rights, labor unions, working conditions, and women concerns were minimum and often ignored.

In human behavior, consensus to anti-communist ideals became the norm for everyone, especially government employees. Firm anti-communist demeanor was expected from everyone, particularly those in government. Campaigns to rid government of so-called "reds" became commonplace. One was the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which used the Smith Act of 1940 to prosecute anyone advocating communism. In such a fervent era of anti-communism, the junior senator for Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy, employed this hysteria to prosecute countless government officials. To promote liberal ideas, civil rights advancements or possible cooperation with communist states was enough to mark a person for persecution. Changes in the "conformity" of America however, did not occur until the end of the 1950's, coming slowly at first.

Consensus may have started changing after CBS newscaster Edward R. Murrow and producer Fred Friendly showcased McCarthy's indictment of Air Force lieutenant Milo Radulovich. Lt. Radulovich had been asked to resign because his father and sister were once accused of reading "subversive newspapers." Murrow and Friendly confronted McCarthy directly, accusing him of assaulting peoples integrity, destroying careers, and using "character assassinations to seize control of the political process." (3) In the television and film industries, many actors and actresses were blacklisted for their assumed leftist views. Movies became a vehicle to exhibit the discontent against the system with films by James Dean and Marlon Brandon among a few.

Literature flourished with themes of individualism versus the system. With poets like Robert Lowell, critics like Dwight McDonald, movies like "Rebel Without a Cause" and "The Wild Ones", rock-and-roll music, and college student unions, "conformity" in the 1950's was all but secured. These critics of "conformity" championed individualism and the younger generation's anxiety over nuclear war. Another area of criticism was the economy. Even though poverty had declined, between one-fifth to one-fourth of the nation could not survive on the income earned. (4) It wasn't until the end of McCarthyism that dissent increased, reaching a crescendo during the Johnson/Nixon administrations of the late 60's and early 70's.

The longest conflict of the twentieth century, the Cold War affected everything, from political ideology, foreign and domestic policy, to the presidency and the personal lives of Americans. With the collapse of the Iron curtain in Eastern Europe, the unification of Germany, the fragmentation and subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union have all but eliminated the Cold War. International cooperation during the first Gulf War demonstrated that even before the end of the Soviet Union, the rhetoric of the past no longer had any place in American foreign or domestic policy.